We Could Lose Ourselves (And Paint These Walls in Pitchfork Red)

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We Could Lose Ourselves (And Paint These Walls in Pitchfork Red)

by thesharpestthings

Summary

"I actually… can't really remember," Will swallowed, "but...that night- it - I feel different. Maybe Alana is right - I should get away from all this."

"What do you remember?" the doctor asked, eyes looking steadily at Will's downturned head.

"I remember one of your former patients breaking into my home." Will bit at each of the words as he said them, hoping they would land properly, but suspecting that Hannibal wouldn't really care. Looking up, Will met Hannibal's eyes.

Notes

Note: I did my best with the human anatomy, FBI, and psychiatry. These are not my fields. If I get anything wrong, please just blame it on Hannibal, he probably deserves some blame anyway.

Inspired by this prompt: https://crisisoninfintefandoms.tumblr.com/post/180353742972/soi-had-a-horrible-angsty-idea-for-a-hannigram-au

Also thanks to GoodForTheSoul for the AU-Werewolf/Vampire suggestion. :-)

Title comes from My Chemical Romance's "It's Not a Fashion Statement, It's a Death Wish"

Chapter 1

Hannibal's Office; Thursday, February 20th.

"I actually… can't really remember," Will swallowed, "but...that night- it - I feel different. Maybe Alana is right - I should get away from all this."

"What do you remember?" the doctor asked, eyes looking steadily at Will's downturned head.

"I remember one of your former patients breaking into my home." Will bit at each of the words as he said them, hoping they would land properly, but suspecting that Hannibal wouldn't really care. Looking up, Will met Hannibal's eyes.

"And I suppose you think I sent that patient to you as some sort of revenge? One psychopathic assassin for another?"

"I guess we're equal now."

Hannibal smiled. "What else do you remember?"

"He was wearing something - some sort of animal skin - he was covered in hair - I think. He scratched one of my dogs, and bit me." Will absently touched the upper limb of his right arm as he shared this, feeling at the raised groves that were somehow still warm where they rested just below his shoulder. Another battle scar. He was collecting quite a few lately.

"And what did you do in return?"

"He was going to kill me. And my dogs. I thought Buster was dead. So, I killed him first."

"How?"

"I- with my hands."

Hannibal's smile broadened. "And how did that feel?"

Will, crossing his leg over the other, leaned back into one of the over-sized chairs Hannibal keeps in his office. "It felt - good. I felt - alive."

"And then what?" Hannibal pushed.

Will worked to recollect that night. His memory was sporadic, and while his recollection of that night was not completely lost to the void like so many other nights, it seemed to exist somewhere beneath layers of dirt and rock in his brain. He could remember the way that night felt- the surprise, followed swiftly by the fiery sensation of power and the narcotic -

almost giddy - sense of pleasure. All that was as simple to access as if he were reliving the moment right now, but the material details were harder to come by.

He stood up and began to pace alongside the two chairs. As he slowly approached where Hannibal sat, the doctor grew paler and his face became distorted into a caricature of pure disgust. By the time Will was just a foot away from Hannibal, the repulsion grew into something unbearable.

Hannibal, his face turned completely away and buried beneath his elbow, growled “Return to your chair- Please!”

Will stopped short, surprised by the outburst, then walked backwards to his chair, never taking his eyes off of Hannibal, wondering what happened.

Still deliberately turned away from Will, Hannibal stood up, picked up his chair, and placed it at a greater distance, making the expanse between the two men at least eight feet.

Will’s heart sank as he watched Hannibal move his chair. Unfortunately, Hannibal had behaved similarly during their last few sessions together. Will made sure to take a shower before coming today, but apparently that wasn’t sufficient enough to fix whatever repulsive thing lived beneath his skin and oozed out of his pores.

Why do you keep coming here? Will asked himself. Is Hannibal’s psychiatry so good that it’s worth going through this over and over again? His vision began to shake and blur as he briefly considered that maybe Hannibal was just the first person to truly see him. It’s something that he thought of - no, felt - many times before- that Hannibal’s gaze could pierce through his fleshy exterior, and see all of the festering filth that lay within. Maybe his inner self was far darker than Hannibal’s. Maybe they weren’t as similar as Will thought. Maybe it was time to go.

“I’m going to-” Will started to get out of his chair in an attempt to leave and save Hannibal from being in the same room as him for any longer. Hannibal interrupted just as he pushed himself out of his seat.

“Everything is fine,” the doctor glowered. “There’s no need to leave. Just stay over there where you are.” Hannibal slowly lowered his elbow, carefully smelling the air before allowing his arm to rest once more in his lap. “Go on. What happened after you killed him? What do you recall?”

Will sighed. As usual, he decided the best thing to do was to pretend like nothing happened. He continued digging into his memory. “I sat there. In his blood. For a long time - I think. Hours, maybe. Or it could have been minutes. But when I got up and turned on the lights, his animal suit -his hairiness- it was gone. He was completely naked. Maybe I’m forgetting something, a step…”

“Maybe you didn’t see him correctly to begin with,” Hannibal offered, still pale and glaring in Will’s direction, his hand now casually covering his mouth and nose.

“Maybe.” Will agreed. “Then I brought his body here, to you. And I don’t remember leaving you that night. And I don’t remember most of my nights since.”

“You suffered a trauma. The body and mind sometimes react to trauma in strange ways. Perhaps these memory lapses are just your mind protecting itself.”

Will pulled his eyes away from Hannibal’s, unable to say what he was about to say directly to Hannibal’s face. “It doesn’t seem like trauma. I feel like I’m running towards something, not away from it.” An image from two days ago flashed into Will’s mind: the last time he emerged from one of his memory lapses, it was just about 5 in the morning. He was in the forest near his home, and he was completely nude, holding the dead and bloody carcass of a rabbit. Will remembered the desire - no, that’s not entirely true. What he felt was a thirst, a hunger for the vibrant blood dripping from the rabbit’s matted fur and the way it splashed on him, creating a tantalizing contrast with his pale skin.

Will briefly bit his lower lip, the sensation pulling himself back into the present moment. “But maybe you’re right,” he briskly added, once more risking meeting Hannibal’s eyes.

A brief flicker of recognition passed across Hannibal’s face as it returned to its formally composed and polite smile. “Maybe. But now onto brighter things. You should come to the dinner party I’m hosting tomorrow night. Socializing can sometimes help in cases of trauma.”

“You really don’t have to invite me. I wouldn’t make sense at a party like that.” Will was certain that this invitation was extended only out of politeness. Maybe Hannibal was nervous that Will noticed the hand-written menus and invitations that currently littered his office desk. And now he felt that he had to invite him - loathsome insides and all.

“No,” Hannibal sighed. “I do have to invite you. It would be good for your treatment. As your psychiatrist as well as your friend, I advise you go.”

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

> Will attends Hannibal's dinner party. Unfortunately, it's pretty much exactly what he expects.

Hannibal's Home, Friday, February 21st

Will took a deep breath before knocking on the doctor's door. Although he had visited Hannibal's office and home many times before, this was the first time that he had been invited to one of the doctor's famous dinner parties. It would also be the first time Will would enjoy some of Hannibal's *special* food with other people present, where he'd have to share the doctor's attention as well as his cooking. Will's throat tightened with each passing second, the sounds of polite conversation and muffled laughter threatening to destroy his already frayed nerves. Will wasn't sure why he agreed to come tonight, nor did he completely understand why Hannibal invited him.

The door opened, and Hannibal, dressed in a light grey well-tailored suit, welcomed him in.

"Will, welcome," Hannibal greeted, a small smile playing on his thin lips as he quickly backed away from Will and further into the foyer. "I'm so glad you were able to make it. I was beginning to suspect that something else was demanding your attention."

"No, I just wasn't quite sure what to wear," Will explained, looking down at his far less impressive outfit, consisting of dark blue jeans, a tweed jacket, red flannel shirt and a yellow neck-tie, all of which were covered in dog hair and wrinkles. "This was all I could find," Will apologetically explained, looking up at Hannibal's reassuring smile. "I haven't worn a proper suit since my father's funeral. And I don't know where that ended up. Or, at least I couldn't find it."

Once Will entered the foyer and closed the door behind him, Hannibal lightly placed a hand between Will's shoulder blades and gently guided him further inside. Will felt fire at the

touch, but couldn't help notice how Hannibal stretched the rest of him as far away from his guiding hand as possible. Almost as if he was handling toxic waste.

Once they arrived at the doorframe separating the foyer from the crowded parlor, Hannibal's hand left Will's back and the two stopped moving. Will, distracted momentarily by the dizzying amount of rich Baltimoreans in Hannibal's home, stared into the parlor. Hannibal's voice brought him back into the foyer.

"Your outfit is perfect for such an event. It is my hope that my friends feel comfortable in my home. You shouldn't feel like you have to dress differently for one of my parties."

Will grinned to himself, and turned back towards Hannibal, about to warn him that, for all his warm cordiality, his snobbish guests were likely to feel differently - but stopped in his tracks when he saw Hannibal, who was studying the hand that just moments ago rested comfortably on Will's back. Hannibal's nose scrunched in disgust before sensing Will's eyes studying him. Hannibal takes a step away from Will and swallows hard, wincing through his attempt at a polite smile.

"You should go in and introduce yourself to some of the guests. I'm sure you'll find them of interest, though I know you think most of my friends are snobby," He gestured towards his parlor, his mischievous smile graciously removing any sign of his former disgust "I need to check on dinner."

Will nodded curtly before wandering into the room swarming with people, all wearing fine suits, taffeta gowns, golden cufflinks, and pearls. He grabbed a glass of wine from one of the passing waiters and slid himself into the furthest-away-from-people chair he could find. When he was sure that nobody was looking at him, Will covertly smelled his shirt, then one of his arm-pits. He didn't smell. *Or, at least, I don't think I do* , he told himself.

Whatever it was that made Hannibal react like that, it was beyond Will. In fact, he wasn't entirely sure why Hannibal invited him tonight. Will clearly isn't the dinner party type. In fact, he's barely the party type. He stuck out like a sore thumb amidst this sea of shiny, happy people. Wouldn't this embarrass Hannibal to not only know someone like Will, but to show him off? Or maybe Will was here to behave like some sort of zoo animal. An interesting specimen for all of the normal people to observe and discuss. A living, breathing conversation-starter.

Will sighed and stood up, a sweaty palm patting his clothes as smoothly as possible. He was suddenly acutely aware of multiple pairs of eyes glaring at him, upset by his awkward presence ruining their otherwise perfect evening. He looked around, searching the room for any signs of Hannibal's return, or at the very least, for someone else he recognized. But no such luck.

Will's throat tightened at the thought of having to make polite conversation with a stranger. This shouldn't be as difficult as he's acting, he thinks, inwardly kicking himself. Plus, if he was going to continue being around Hannibal, he certainly would have to get used to nights like this. They can't always be alone, one-on-one. Will suddenly thought that he could using their gracious host as a topic starter might be a good idea to make a new acquaintance - "Hi, I'm Will. And you are? And how do you know Hannibal?" He smiled inwardly. He would show Hannibal that he could behave normally, that he wasn't some sort of loathsome creature from which Hannibal and all his polite guests had to keep their distance.

Will swallowed hard, once more fidgeting with his wrinkly jacket and shirt, and began to move towards the person closest to him who wasn't already in conversation with somebody else. As he walked, he concentrated on pushing the edges of his mouth into something that at least resembled the confident smile his friend so often wears. Upon reaching his destination, Will tapped lightly on the man's padded shoulder. As the man turned, Will began his rehearsed lines:

"Hi, I'm Wi-"

But before Will could finish, the man cut him off with a loud grunt of disgust, looking Will up and down.

"Excuse me," the man said, loudly enough that others nearby began to turn towards them.

Will's face began to burn, his nervous fingers unconsciously fiddling with the hem of his jacket. He could feel everyone looking at him. *Why can I feel everyone looking at me?* He absently wondered to himself.

“Excuse me,” the man repeated, loudly now, leaning away from Will with upturned palms in a dramatic pantomime of fear and disgust. “Aren’t you that serial killer who got off recently? The Ripper? Or something like that? Didn’t you try to get Hannibal killed? You accused him of the most heinous things.”

“I didn’t really know Hannibal that well then.” Not that Will knew him any better now. And anyway, Will was right- Hannibal was the Ripper. He was only wrong in thinking that he didn’t share in many of Hannibal’s interests. “And it was a mistrial,” he weakly added.

“Even so, I highly doubt that the doctor would want you here. Anyway, this is a private residence and this party is invite only. Based on your ignorance of the dress code, you clearly didn’t receive an invitation.” The man sneered as he looked Will up and down once more before turning to the small crowd gathering around them. Will avoided looking at the faces that composed this crowd- the affected performances of shock and disgust, as well as the snickering, were old hat by now. Anyway, he had something else to focus on.

“...dress code?” Will choked out, mildly panicking.

“Yes,” the man responded impatiently. “It was outlined on the invitation. This is a black tie affair.”

“Oh...” Will mumbles, his head down. An image briefly flashed in Will’s mind of him covered in this man’s blood, his right arm elbow-deep in the man’s mouth as he scratched and tore at the man’s insides. Will smiled at the thought before quickly turning and walking away, gently pushing at the claustrophobic circle of party-goers surrounding them. Once out, Will placed the glass of wine he barely drank onto the closest table, careful to place it on the linen with which Hannibal dresses his tables rather than directly on the wood. He decided he would let Hannibal know he had to leave early the next time he saw him. There was no reason to stop and talk now. *Plus* , Will thought angrily, *Why didn’t Hannibal tell me about a dress code?*

Upon reaching the doorframe that separated Hannibal’s parlor from the foyer, Will stopped and turned to look back into the parlor. Hannibal was there, standing just behind the man and the now-disassembling crowd. He wasn’t looking at Will, thank God. Even so, Will instinctively crouched further into the shadows of the foyer and watched in horror as Hannibal moved across the room directly to the chair that Will was sitting in just moments

ago. Standing near it, Hannibal took a whiff, visibly cringed in disgust, picked it up, and handed it to one of the waiters, who quickly took it out of view of the guests.

Will once more smelled himself, but didn't smell anything beyond the lingering scene of his lavender laundry detergent. He couldn't imaging that his scent was still contaminating one of Hannibal’s chairs, or that Hannibal hated the smell of lavender so much. When Will looked back up from his armpit, he noticed - to his supreme horror - that Hannibal was looking directly at him. Will swallowed hard and immediately ducked out of Hannibal’s home.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

We've got a crime scene, ladies and gentlemen!
And perhaps we've also got a little gift from Hanni to Will? Maybe?

Crime Scene, Monday, February 24

Despite the chilly weather, Will felt his palms begin to sweat as he approached the display. He was the last to arrive at the scene, and as he walked closer, he briefly nodded towards Jack, Hannibal, and Alana. Jack returned the greeting, wearing his usual stoic frown before curtly telling the forensics team to leave, that they needed a moment alone with the body. Alana smiled towards Will. Hannibal's steady eyes never left the body displayed before him.

"We found this one today. What do you see?" Jack asked Will, once more staring at the corpse on display.

Will walked closer to the body, his mouth suddenly dry.

What he saw was something that was once a man. Thanks to the support of a long metal stand, the body stood in the middle of the snowy forest facing a small handheld mirror that was pinned to the trunk of a nearby Black Oak. Sutures lined the inner outline of the body. The skin looked strange- pink and dry. Two marks on the inner left wrist disturb the otherwise perfect smoothness of -

Jack's voice suddenly interrupted Will's quick observations. "Forensics says that all of his blood has been drained and that the eyeballs were removed and reattached in the wrong way, the left eye is now his right eye, and vice versa. Same with the skin- it was removed then sewn back on inside out. We still don't have an ID."

Will walked in between the mirror and the former-man before walking away a few paces, just behind the man's left shoulder. From this vantage, he can see the strange eyes of the corpse reflected back through the dainty mirror.

Will felt the three others quietly walk away, giving him his needed space. He took a deep breath, and allowed that familiar burning energy within to take control. He savored every minute of relinquishing control to this power. Will watched as the corpse floated off the stand before him. The man's eyes, teeth, and skin dripped off. A flash of light and Will suddenly found himself peering from behind a dark corner in one of Baltimore's nicer neighborhoods, watching as a man walked down the sidewalk. His outfit was expensive, showy. His face was one of self-satisfaction. And pride. Will's stomach somersaulted and leaped in excitement before he glided out of the shadows, placing the man in a chokehold, holding a cloth wet with

chloroform over the man's mouth. Time jolted forward once again. Now Will stood in a darkly lit but nicely furnished and sterile room. There were no windows. It felt familiar. The man, now naked, lay on the table before him. Will delighted in the satisfaction of cutting and pulling the man's skin off in one go like a glove, and holding a perfect human suit in his hands. He next pulled out the eyes and the teeth, and connected numerous small tubes to the man's veins to extract the blood. But this doesn't work. Blood was everywhere- on the table, Will's hands.

I need all of the blood, Will thought to himself. *Maybe the killer drained the blood beforehand? But how is it so perfect, so completely dry? Simple tubes wouldn't do that.*

Frozen in this fantasy, Will decided to push forward. *I'll work out the blood question later.* Will carefully pulled the skin back onto the man before sewing the inner outline with large black string. *I want you to be ugly, I want your insides out to show the world who you are,* Will whispered to his creation as he worked. He lightly tapped each tooth back into the man's gums piece by piece, each in a wrong position, some backwards and others askew, creating a mouth of jagged teeth. Because the gums no longer had blood in them - *how???* - this part of the process was clean. With masterful surgical skill, Will reattached the eyes- placing the left eye in the right socket, and the right eye in the left. Will blinked. He found himself once more in the forest, but this time, the ground was covered in long shadows, it was night. He carried his creation and placed it on a metal pedestal, careful to position it just right. Next Will attached the mirror to the tree. Will stepped back to where he currently stood, admiring the way the man's mangled face reflected back at itself through the mirror. Will heard his voice say "This is my design." Will's eyes opened, once more finding himself standing in front of the corpse, but it was daytime and Jack quickly moved to his right.

"Well?" Jack asked.

"This is all about pride. The killer is punishing and humiliating him for his vanity. The victim is forced to look at his rotting insides, and we get to see it, too," Will said, unable to remove his eyes from the body in front of him.

Suddenly, Hannibal was at his other shoulder, surveying the scene. "Perhaps the killer felt insulted by this man. Or insulted on behalf of another because of this man."

"What, like a friend?" asked Jack.

"Yes, something like that." Hannibal quietly responded, returning his attention to the body before him. "It reminds me of Bosch's painting of the seven deadly sins. He represents pride as a woman dressed in pink indulging herself in a small mirror, held by a demon."

Upon hearing that the killer may have an interest in classical art, Jack started. "Are you saying this might be the Ripper?"

Will sneered, still looking at the body. "Are you sure you're asking the right people, Jack?" Will's anger briefly boiled in his throat. Jack never apologized for accusing him of being the Ripper. In fact, he had yet to acknowledge the fact that Will spent months under Chilton's invasive care. On the other hand, the irony didn't escape Will that he himself had accused

Hannibal of the very same thing, and he never apologized to Hannibal. Of course, Will was right in his accusation, so an apology didn't really seem necessary.

Jack winced at the anger in Will's response. "I can still count on you both to offer your insight, can't I?"

Alana was quick to jump in. "Will, this all might be too much. Maybe you need to take a break, at least, if not something longer, from all this."

Will silently stared forward for a few moments, maintaining eye contact with the jumbled eyes in the mirror. He admired the smoothness of the skin, the craft of the skinning itself, and the gilded mirror attached to the tree. The elements worked beautifully together. The Ripper's calling-card- the missing blood and the two small marks on the wrist- was there. "This is the Ripper," he stated. "And I think this is not only a punishment for the victim, but also some sort of message."

"A message? Saying what? That he's back?" asked Jack.

"I think it's meant for us to see," answered Will, still looking forward. "He's hoping the victim's ID will be discovered and reported. Someone will learn that this man has been punished for what he's done."

"Perhaps," offered Hannibal, "It's a message not for us, but for the Ripper's friend that this man insulted."

Will paused, his eyes flickered for the briefest of moments. He thought immediately of the man that embarrassed him at Hannibal's dinner party. *Did Hannibal kill him for me?* If this was a message for Will, then the message was clear. It was a promise. But a promise of what, exactly? Of protection? Friendship? Something else?

"A friend? You think that the Ripper can socialize? That he has friends?" asked Alana incredulously.

Will turned to face Hannibal. For the briefest of moments, he saw Hannibal smiling at him. *Yes,* Will thought. *This is the body of the man from the dinner party.*

"That might be right," Will said, still looking up at his friend. But just as the air with which Will uttered these words hit Hannibal's face, the doctor morphed into something pale and full of disgust and anger. Hannibal quickly moved away, darting behind Jack before pretending that the move was deliberate. He slowed down and pantomimed reappraising the scene before him.

Will hated this. *Why send this message if Hannibal can't even stand being near me? What is the point of all this?* Will wished that Hannibal would simply hate him. Every time he began to believe that someone actually cared about him, Hannibal would make it clear that he found Will revolting. Will pulled his eyes away from Hannibal and looked down at his feet. "Is that all?" Will asked coldly, hoping to leave this scene of humiliation.

Jack sighed. "Yes. Does anybody need a ride back?"

“I’ll join you, Jack,” Hannibal said. “I don’t want to stay around here any longer than I have to,” he added, his eyes darting quickly to Will.

Will and Alana watched the two men walk away before they started walking to their own cars. As they began to move, the forensics team moved past them, returning to their investigation of the scene.

“Are you sure you’re okay doing this again, Will? I mean, it hasn’t been so long since you were supposed to be the Ripper. And that night…” Alana trails off, looking at Will with concern.

“I can handle it.” Will responded evenly, with some chill. “I’ve been feeling better. Surprisingly, the sessions with Hannibal help.”

“Are you sure seeing Hannibal is the right thing for you?” she asked. “I know he thinks highly of you, but you also accused him of being the Ripper. Maybe it would benefit you to talk to someone new, a completely objective observer...”

Will attempted-but failed- to suppress a cold laugh after hearing this. “Thinks highly of me? He can’t even stand to be around me. He can’t get away fast enough. I’m surprised *he* hasn’t referred me to someone else yet.”

Will had a theory for this- Hannibal hadn’t entirely rejected Will likely because Will knew too much. And honestly, Hannibal knew too much about Will. It was this knowledge alone that binded them, at least on Hannibal’s end. But then again, that doesn’t really explain the Ripper’s latest message. *Would he kill for someone he found repulsive?* Will considered this, looking back at the corpse. *Maybe someone does care. Maybe Hannibal* - Wary of indulging in a hope that would undoubtedly never come to fruition, Will shook this thought away. This kill was probably not a message, and even if it was, it certainly couldn’t be a message for him. Will couldn’t allow himself to be so stupid to actually believe it was. This was obviously just another one of Hannibal’s mind games. After all, he never needed a reason to kill beyond satisfying his own pleasure before.

“Are you kidding? Hannibal adores you,” Alana suddenly interrupted his thoughts. When Will looked up at her, he saw that she was incredulously studying Will’s face for signs that this was meant to be some sort of joke. “You’re all he ever talks about. In fact, one of my original concerns with you being his patient was that he cares too much about you. I can’t believe you didn’t notice?”

Will’s brow furrowed as his throat tightened. “I did notice that, sometimes- I guess. But, most of the time, I feel like I’m some sort of specimen Hannibal is studying. One he doesn’t find very pleasant.”

“I know that feeling.” Alana smiled softly. “Hannibal can be withholding about these sorts of things. I don’t think he’s used to friendship.”

“We have that in common,” Will said far less bitterly than he intended. The thought of Hannibal talking about him to other people created a jumble of emotions inside Will - it was baffling, and terrifying all at once. Will wanted to know exactly what Hannibal said about

him, what Hannibal liked about him, but there was no way he could form the words needed to ask that question right now. Or really ever, if he was being honest. Instead, he consciously worked to look as unaffected by this news as possible as he said goodbye to Alana, got into his car, and made his way home.

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

> Later that night, Will feeds himself and the pack before bed. His otherwise ordinary night is interrupted by a familiar scent.
> Also, the pack is acting strangely obedient. Yes, even Buster.
>
> This is a shorter chapter, but it's to get us to Chapter 5, which I promise will be nice and juicy. :)

Monday, February 24

Will scooped the ground meat and veggie mixtures he had previously prepared out of their zip-locked containers and placed a heaping spoonful into each of the metal dog bowls before him. He then carefully measured the right amount of dry food for each of the bowls using a plastic measuring cup.

“Okay, okay, it’s coming, relax” he said to the pitter-patter of excited dog paws on the wooden floor. A smile played across his lips as he moved towards the fridge, hoping to grab the final ingredient for their meal, but, just as he finished speaking, the sounds of paws seemed to suddenly stop. Will stopped dead in his tracks, confused, and turned around. All six dogs sat perfectly still, looking up at him. Nobody seemed hurt, they just seemed…. To be relaxing? *Since when did they listen to me?* Will briefly wondered to himself, staring in particular at Buster, who, despite still being bandaged and healing from that night, tended to be the least likely to ever sit still.

Will moved on, opening the fridge, and taking out a half-full plastic bag of shredded cheddar cheese. He sprinkled two healthy pinches of cheese atop each bowl before taking a spoon and mixing the ingredients up until they transformed into the dogs’ favorite meal. Will next carried the bowls three at a time to the front porch, every now and then pausing in astonishment to look back at the dogs, who were all still sitting where he had left them in the kitchen.

“Okay, come get your dinner,” Will said to the dogs, leaning through the front door. The moment Will finished speaking, all six leapt up and ran out to their bowls. Will took a moment to stare at them, not sure what to do - *Are they okay? They seem healthy enough…* . Satisfied that the dogs were fine, Will absently pushed his glasses back into place, threw on his puffy winter jacket, and went back inside to grab his dinner - a less-lovingly-made McDonald’s hamburger and fries - from the kitchen counter. With food in hand, Will went back out to the porch and sat down in one of the chairs facing his front-yard, the driveway, and the forest beyond. The dogs were already done with their dinner, and all of them were playing in the yard, save for Buster, who sat in one of the dog beds on the porch. Upon seeing

Will come out with more food, Buster sat up, looked pleadingly at Will, and even let out a sad little yelp. “No, this is mine. You already had your dinner,” Will softly told Buster, who normally would ignore this truth; however, for some reason, on this evening, Buster seemed to understand. The small dog licked his lips and nestled back into his bed.

Will also settled into his chair and unwrapped his burger. He bit into it, enjoying feeling the grease drench his teeth as he chewed the mystery meat. Without realizing it, Will’s mind immediately drifted toward Hannibal. He smiled to himself mid-chew, imagining how deeply Hannibal would frown if he knew what Will was eating. Knowing that Hannibal would disapprove made this meal all the more delicious. He felt rebellious. His smile broadened. He stuck his hand in the brown paper bag and pulled out a fistful of fries, which he quickly shoved into his mouth. But all at once, this food didn’t taste as good as it did just seconds before. Hannibal wasn’t here. And unlike Will, Hannibal probably wasn’t thinking about him. Will suddenly felt very lonely.

What sort of rebellion even is this if Hannibal isn’t even here to witness it? Would I even have the guts to do this if I knew he could see me?. These questions shoved their way to the forefront of his mind where he was unable to push them away. They grew and multiplied into more questions until they formed one final question etched in bold capital letters: ***WHY CAN’T I NOT THINK ABOUT HIM?*** Will frowned at this, a smudge of ketchup hanging on the corner of his lips. He shook his head and continued to eat his burger and fries. He didn’t *have* to think about Hannibal Lecter. He could think of other things. He leaned forward and concentrated his energy on watching the dogs variously run and lounge on the dark grass before him. His eyes soon drifted to the forest behind them. The trees gentled rustled in the wintry breeze and the air felt dry and sharp. More snow was coming.

Will stretched out his legs, arched his back, and briefly enjoyed the satisfying sounds of his bones cracking in response. He crumpled up the paper that once encased his burger and threw that and the tiny empty fry container into the paper bag to throw out. He stood up, and was just about to call in the dogs, when a strange bit of movement caught his eye. He only saw it for the briefest of moments, but it was long and dark. It moved amongst the trees of the surrounding forest, but just as quickly as it appeared, it briefly -bizarrely - seemed to float up and disappear into the treetops. Will froze as the hairs on the back of his neck stood up. Something felt wrong. Buster suddenly sat up in his bed, growling low in the direction of the movement. The other dogs began starring in that direction too, growling, whimpering, and barking in turn. Will felt the sensation of being watched, and he didn’t like it. He wanted desperately to run into the forest, to find whatever was out there - but he resisted this urge. He wasn’t in the mood for a fight tonight and he’d need to protect the dogs first, anyway. If whatever it was wanted a fight, they’d have to come a little closer.

“Ok, let’s go inside,” he called softly. Continuing the strangeness of this evening, the dogs obeyed immediately, dropping interest in the forest, and running inside.

Will softly closed the screen door behind him and slowly stepped back out.

“Hello?” He called out to the wilderness. A small part of him - no, that was a lie - a *large* part of him desperately wanted some sort of monster to be standing in the woods. Will suddenly

noticed that his body - which was rapidly heating up for some reason - literally *ached* for a fight.

Will started at this realization. *No, I don't want a fight. I want to just go to sleep. It's been a long day, and I don't want the dogs to be in any danger, no matter how good it would feel* - All of a sudden, his thoughts froze and disappeared. He instead focused on something new, something he couldn't resist. Smelling the familiar scent that quickly blew past him was as automatic for him as was breathing his next gulp of air. It was the only gust of wind that he noticed that night, and just as quickly as it came, it was gone. *But that smell…* The smell was troublingly familiar. It was Hannibal. But why would he be out here?

"Hannibal?" Will called weakly. It embarrassed him to hear his voice tremble out the syllables that formed the doctor's name. Like Hannibal's name was something he shouldn't be allowed to feel in his mouth.

Anyway, there was no response. Hannibal wasn't there.

He probably just imagined the doctor's smell, for whatever humiliating reason. And even if Hannibal was out there, there was no way that Will would be able to smell him from this distance. He grimaced. The doctor really had gotten into his brain. Now he was imagining Hannibal's *scent*? Will's cheeks flushed and grew warm, but whether that was from anger, embarrassment, or something else, Will couldn't be sure. But no matter how much he hated himself for actually smelling the doctor's signature cologne - an unmistakable smoky mix of patchouli and ebony wood - in the wind of his front yard, Will wanted more. He slowly walked down his porch's steps and stepped onto the grass. He took in a deep whiff. But, it was gone. *Or, more likely, it wasn't even there to begin with,* Will scolded himself.

Will let out a sigh, his shoulders slumped and he returned back up the porch steps. Heading back inside the house, the dogs weaving in and out of his legs as he stepped towards his bed, Will faced a troubling revelation.

Fuck. I wish Hannibal was here.

Will removed his jacket, placed his glasses on a nearby table, unhooked his belt, stepped out of jeans, and unbuttoned and peeled off his flannel shirt. "Time for bed, everyone" he mumbled in the general direction of his dogs, who immediately curled up into their beds on the floor. Will didn't take the time to note this moment of weird obedience, as he was instead concentrating on weirdly obedient the dogs were acting today, and instead concentrated on the growing warmth he felt on his skin. He fell into his bed, and just as his head hit the bare pillow, an image of Hannibal clouded his mind. Will ground his teeth as he allowed himself to concentrate on his memory of Hannibal's dark eyes, his thin lips, which always seemed to have a secret smile contained on their edges. Will's fingers absently traced gently along his chest as he indulged in these thoughts. He wondered what Hannibal wore to bed, and quickly decided that the doctor most likely donned monogrammed silk pajama sets and somehow avoided bedhead. A small chuckle escaped Will's lips imagining this.

Maybe he sleeps naked?

An image of Hannibal naked burned quickly into Will's mind's eye. He stood in the darkness before the fireplace, and the soft glow managed to illuminate the doctor's outline. Will took in the soft patch of salty curls that covered Hannibal's broad chest, his angular shoulders, and allowed his eyes to move down Hannibal's arms, where he found two strong hands, one of which boldly stroked an engorged cock.

Will's eyes snapped open at the sudden presence of this intrusive thought. He didn't quite know where it came from. Some deeper part of him? Or maybe it came from the doctor himself? Who knows what Hannibal did to his mind… maybe he left some part of himself in there?

Practically trembling, Will forced his eyes closed again, actively refusing to let that image or that voice back into his mind. He turned onto his belly, prayed that his boxers would stop feeling so tight, and actively began counting sheep.

And that was the last thing Will remembered.

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Will finds himself naked and bloody in the woods.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Tuesday, February 25, 3:12 AM

Swelling darkness. The warm and salty smell of blood.

“What the fuck is wrong with you?!”

The shout felt as if it came from another world. Will swallowed, finding that a massive lump had formed in his throat. He resisted the sudden urge to puke, and opened his eyes. He was on the ground, outside, his belly down on the grass. He was somewhere in the middle of the woods, the sky still pitch black, but what felt like a spotlight covered him in artificial brightness. Beyond all this, Will could only see his right hand, which rested next to his face, but he had enough information to know that something was horribly wrong. His fingers and nails were caked with blood and other small pieces of gore.

Will’s eyebrows arched in confusion and slight panic as he worked to move his body. With some considerable exertion, he managed to get his legs under him and stand up. Moving felt bizarre, like he was pushing his way through an ocean of jello. Every muscle in his body felt over-worked and stunned.

“I told you to stay down, freak!” shouted the same voice as before, though now it sounded much more clear. Will sensed hostility, fear, and something troublingly close to hunger in the man's voice this time. He began to turn around, hoping to face the owner of this disconcerting voice, but suddenly something powerful and fast collided into his upper jaw, sending him flying back to the ground. Will’s vision briefly cut out, and he struggled to maintain his consciousness. Placing his hands beneath him, Will pushed himself up enough to spit out some blood and the broken shards of a tooth.

“Stay the fuck down,” the voice instructed.

Will stayed where he was and slowly turned his head to once more try to face the voice. This time, he managed to see who was shouting at him. It was a man, somewhere in his late 30’s. He was well-built and wore a dusty dark green jacket over a pair of well-worn jeans. More important than any of that, however, was the rifle he aimed directly at Will's skull. Instinctively, Will raised his hands and began speaking to the man, hoping to calm him down.

“Hey,” Will said, “I’m going to sit down and face you.”

“Do it slowly,” the man nervously commanded.

Will did as he was asked. Once he was seated in a crossed-legged position, he discovered that he was completely nude. He also learned that entire body was caked with a thick layer of blood and gore - it wasn't just on his hands. For a moment, Will was completely mesmerized by the sight of the dark redness, full of texture and slick with fresh wetness, covering his skin. Hannibal had once told him that blood looked black in the moonlight. Will guessed he was right.

“Hello?!” the man’s voice interrupted Will’s reverie. Will looked back up at him. “Yea, asshole, eyes up here.”

“What’s going on? Who are you?” Will asked, dazed. “And where are we?”

Shock and sadness briefly flickered across the man’s face before it returned to its controlled portrayal of threatening intimidation. “Come on. You know. You know.” He spat on the ground.

“I - I don’t, honestly…” Will trailed off and his eyes followed. Just beyond the man with the gun, a large bloody lump of clothing lay in the grass. It looked like a dead body. “Are they - did you kill them?” Will asked, eyes motioning towards the thing in the grass.

The man suddenly lurched forward, grabbed Will by the back of the neck and dragged him forward, throwing him down hard against the corpse.

“Do you recognize him now?” The man shouted.

“No, no, I don’t.” Will said, shaking his head. “You’re going to have to explai-”

“You killed him. You killed my brother, you sick piece of shit. You remember, you have to remember- look at him, not at me! There are bite marks and he’s not all there, you fuck!” The gun was up in Will’s face again, but much more shaky now that the man screamed this news at him. Will noticed that this man was right about one thing, at least- large bite marks covered the corpse, and a troubling chunk of the corpse's right calf was gone. This seemed like some sort of animal attack, not something he had done, certainly. And even if he did do it, he would remember doing *that,* wouldn't he?

“I don’t think that’s right. I don’t even have a weapon on me. Clearly.” Will said, trying desperately to remember whether this was his doing or not. It couldn’t be, he would remember *this.* But then again, he *was* covered in blood and his mouth *did* of salt and iron. McDonald's hamburgers and fries typically don't leave this sort of aftertaste.

“I saw you, you grabbed him away from where we were hunting, and dragged him all the way here, where I found you both. He was... dead... and you, you were...you were naked...and passed out... on top of him.” The man took a deep breath, wiping away an errant tear that had appeared on his cheek. He concentrated once more on holding the gun and aiming it at the psychopath who murdered his brother. “I don’t know what happened between the time you

first grabbed him and the moment I finally found you both, but I do know that he was dead and bloody, and you seemed much smaller than when I first saw you. You were also suddenly naked and had- you had his…blood all over your fucking mouth."

"I don't-" Will was going to explain to this man that he worked with the FBI, that he would be able to help this man find whoever did this to his brother, but suddenly Will felt something in his throat. It didn't feel like the burger or one of the fries he had before bed, this was bigger, much harder. Suddenly he couldn't breathe. Will fell back down onto his hands and knees, coughing and retching.

"Stop it! Stop moving!" The man shouted nervously.

The thing in Will's throat mercifully found its way out of his airway and into his mouth. It was warm and hard. Will spit it out, then gazed in horror at what he saw. A chunk of flesh attached to a piece of tattooed skin. Will could make out some flames, along with what seemed to be the first two digits of a date: "12/." There was dead silence for a moment. Both men were frozen, looking at this bit of discarded flesh.

"That's his - my broth-..." the man began, unable to form words from his jumbled and enraged thoughts. He swallowed hard and narrowed his eyes on Will, refocusing himself to the task at hand. The man once more brought the gun back up, aiming it directly at Will's head.

Hearing the mechanical sounds of the gun moving back into place (*How did I hear that over everything else going on???*), Will looked back up at the man and once more registered his shaky hands and tear-stained eyes. Will knew that this man would kill him if he got the chance. Will held both of his hands up, his palms open to show the man that he had no weapon, and that there was nothing to fear. All the while, Will maintained steady eye contact.

"Hey, hey. Look at me. We can talk about this, just put the gun down," said Will with calm authority. "You don't want to kill anyone. Just put the-" In the midst of this final instruction, Will suddenly leapt up at the man, swatting the gun out of his hand and landing a powerful punch on the man's lower jaw. The man fell backwards for a moment, but Will was too busy dealing with the chaotic cacophony of his own thoughts to take advantage of his opponent's falter. When Will felt his knuckles collide against this man's flesh something happened. He had longed for another fight, and here it was. A chance to once more feel what it is like to take someone's life with his own bare hands. The taste of blood in his mouth no longer felt rancid and metallic, it now energized him, giving him the feeling that anything was possible, that he was powerful and strong.

The man turned back towards Will and began to run towards him. Will smiled, the flash of blood pouring from the man's mouth excited him. He braced himself for the next move, planning to duck under the man's attack before grabbing at his neck from behind, but he was suddenly overtaken by a deep and cutting pain that radiated across his body. It felt as if his organs and bones momentarily shifted and his skin felt like it was tearing. He quickly looked down at his naked body, finding to his extreme horror that his skin had in fact torn in multiple places. He was only able to briefly look at what seemed to be long hairs poking their way out of the crevices where his skin had ripped before the man's fist collided into his left temple, causing him to momentarily dip into unconsciousness.

When Will came to, he found that the man was sitting on his shoulders, pinning him down as the man delivered punch after punch onto Will's skull. But this wasn't the most painful thing happening to Will at the moment, as his body continued to shift and tear. Panicked, Will tried futilely to push the man off of him, desperate to see what was happening to him. The man felt Will's attempts, and quickly reached into his back pocket, from which he pulled a large hunting knife.

"No- please- something's happening to me -" Will managed to speak through gritted teeth as pain jolted through his body.

The man's eyes flashed down towards Will's torso. He saw something there that made him go pale. "What are you, sick?" He asked before mumbling, "Doesn't matter anyway…" He held the knife up and proceeded to plunge it in and out of Will's shoulders in rapid succession.

Will's mind was going in and out of consciousness even faster than the man's knife repeatedly broke his skin. The pain was unbearable and he lost a significant amount of blood. Whenever he came to, Will tried his best to grip tight onto reality, hoping to find some renewed strength, or for the pain to stop so that he might fight back; unfortunately, Will didn't have any such luck. As he faded further into the darkness of unconsciousness, Will dimly felt the stranger's onslaught suddenly stop. Will absently wondered whether this feeling was just a sign of his mind mercifully beginning to shut down, or that the man really stopped attacking him. If the man did stop, why? Perhaps he thought Will was dead. Which, Will figured, would happen soon enough anyway.

Curious, Will tried to open his eyes, which were swollen shut from the cuts and bruises that now littered his face. After much effort, he managed to open his left eye enough to see through what felt like a tiny slit. The man was there, but there was also the form of a second stranger. The two stood together, one standing just behind the other. The man in front stood slumped over, his arms dangling at his sides, and seemed to be held up by the other man from behind. The person in the back seemed to be wearing a suit that looked familiar to Will, even as he was clinging to life and peering through just the crack that was now his left eye.

The figure in the suit casually threw the original stranger onto the body that lay on the ground, then gracefully turned and glided towards Will's semi-conscious and bloody form. Will was only semi-aware of the fact that his bones and organs had stopped moving and shifting beneath his skin, as he was focusing the bulk of his concentration on the fact that he saw Hannibal - *Yes, it was definitely Hannibal* - moving closer and closer to his prone body.

"Will, you naughty boy. What have you gotten yourself into this time?" Hannibal's voice purred.

Will struggled to respond, desperate to ask Hannibal what he was doing there, or if he was even real or just a figment of his imagination as he rapidly approached the brink of death, but his lips could only shiver a series of meaningless groans.

Hannibal frowned, once more disturbed by Will's unusually obnoxious scent, and scooped the injured man up from the ground, carrying him towards his car. Will felt Hannibal's surprisingly strong arms beneath him. Hannibal's protective embrace provided Will with an incredible feeling of safety and he began to believe that he might actually survive this night.

He briefly wondered whether or not he was insane to feel safe with this man, but he decided to not fight it, at least not in this moment. If Hannibal wanted to kill him, now was his best chance, and anyway Will didn't really care at this point. The pain was unbearable, and it was a small comfort to believe that, if he was going to die, it would be at the hands of a man he… feared? ...respected? ...admired? ....loved? Will couldn't be certain, so he decided instead to just enjoy the feeling of Hannibal's strange coldness supporting him, carrying him to somewhere unknown. He closed his eyes and drifted into a deep sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Apologies - Chapter 6 won't be up until 10/11. I'm currently also writing a dissertation, and that needs a little more of my attention right now. Looking forward to getting back to Will and Hanni next week!

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Will wakes up to find that he has a houseguest.

Tuesday, February 26, 6:07 AM
His mind was woozy, moving in and out of consciousness, just as he had before. His mind was fuzzy and his pain was nearly gone. Will felt almost euphoric in this place which lay somewhere between living and dying. He fluttered his eyes open as wide as he could. Looking around him, he found that his surroundings no longer seemed to be the darkened woods, but the dimly lit space of his bedroom. Will briefly wondered whether he was dead or not, but then decided it didn't really matter. No matter what, the pain was gone and he was somewhere soft and warm. And a familiar face hovered mere inches from his own.

"Isn't... the smell... un...bearable?" he managed to croak out, his dry throat screaming with pain as each syllable was released.

Hannibal's face grinned briefly before once more assuming a clinical expression. "You smell awful. But I'm suffering through it to make sure you're still breathing. I just gave you something for the pain, how do you feel?"

A small laugh escaped Will's cracked lips. "Always the martyr, Hannibal, I don't know how you're getting through it."

Hannibal ignored this retort. "How do you feel?"

Will thought about this question. It felt… strangely happy. And very confused. A bit loopy. It felt like he was strong and weak all at once, like his body was blissfully melting away. But most of all, he was enjoying the bizarre sensation of tasting Hannibal's presence. It was more than delicious; it was exquisite, it was intoxicating. It made Will terrified that Hannibal would leave, that he would be robbed of this feeling of bliss forever. More than anything, then, Will was terrified at the thought of Hannibal disappearing from his room, from his life once more.

As an answer to Hannibal's question, Will's arms shot out from under the blanket that encased him, his hands grabbing at Hannibal, pulling the man's face down to him. Will's lips collided into Hannibal's, delivering a sloppy, almost violent kiss. Will only slightly registered Hannibal's strange response: Hannibal kissed back, but was tense and restrained, as if he had to simultaneously fight against a secondary urge. Will was too busy focusing on the way his stomach was going to rip open. Hannibal had saved him, was nursing him to health, and Will felt the euphoric buzz of whatever drugs he assumed Hannibal had given him. Will was feeling everything there was to feel all at once: passion, anger, lust, hunger… and it was all

centered on this one man. There was no more tip toeing around whatever this was. Will's tongue traced ravenously along the thin line dividing Hannibal's two tense lips before Hannibal allowed him to break through their icy resistance. Will tasted the inside of Hannibal's mouth as his tongue explored this alien terrain. Suddenly, however, Will felt a sharp pain as his tongue sliced open along one of Hannibal's teeth. Will had mere milliseconds to register what happened - *Why is his tooth so sharp? Is this a… fang?* - before Hannibal pushed him hard, sending him crashing back into the bed, his battered body screaming in pain upon the collision.

Will's heart sank in his chest when he saw Hannibal, who now stood hunched over with his back towards him, just a few feet away from where Will lay. Hannibal was retching, vomiting what seemed to an astonished Will to be gallons of steaming reddish liquid. Will panicked, wondering what caused this- was this kiss really that bad? Was it the cut on his tongue? His apparent smell?

Once Hannibal stopped vomiting, he brusquely wiped his lips with the sleeve of his shirt - which, despite this new puke stain, was otherwise perfectly tailored and styled - and turned towards Will, his eyebrows arched in anger and embarrassment.

"Never do that again," Hannibal practically hissed in a voice that Will didn't recognize.

"I thought that that is what you wanted. You seem so interested in me, and... " he trailed off, unable to make sense of this. "Do I really smell that bad?"

Hannibal grinned slightly in spite of himself before commanding Will to "Go back to sleep."

Will suddenly felt very tired and the euphoria reemerged, making his thoughts cloudy and soft as he sank once more into a deep and forgetful sleep.

February 27, 6:42 PM
Will's eyes shot open. He quickly sat up his hands and eyes searching along his chest for the stab wounds and blood that he was sure to find. But there was nothing there, besides one of his old white tee-shirts which he now wore. Will remembered that he could barely open his eyes last he remembered, and now they were normal. And he was definitely naked… but now he had on clothes, both the tee-shirt and a pair of blue plaid boxers. Will looked around himself. He was in his own bed, in his home. He couldn't tell what time it was, but it seemed to be either evening or early morning, based on the weak streaks of sunlight that filtered into his room. And then he noticed the smell… something like bacon. And the sounds of meat crackling on the stove.

Was Hannibal here? Cooking? In my shitty kitchen? No…

Will jumped out of bed, grabbing the nearest pair of pants he could find on the ground. As he begin to slip the pants on, Will froze. A memory - *or was it a dream? please, god, let it be a dream…* - of Hannibal vomiting in this very bedroom after he kissed him flooded into his mind. *Nonononono* Will threw the pants onto the bed and ran over to where he saw *imagined? remembered? dreamed?* Hannibal throwing up. There wasn't any stain or smell. Will got on his knees and pushed his nose against the hardwood floor, exactly where the puke landed. He smelled nothing but the sharp purfumey scent of cleaning product. Will couldn't

remember the last time he truly cleaned the floor of his bedroom - in fact, it probably never was cleaned since he moved in here - but he also couldn't deal with this right now. Not when Hannibal very likely was downstairs. Remembering this, Will briskly walked back to the bed, grabbed his pants and proceeded to put them on while moving. Will was just zipping up the fly as he came upon the man in the kitchen. Yes, just as Will suspected, Hannibal was there, cutting a strange figure as he lorded over an ancient crusty frying pan. Hannibal, as usual, wore a suit immaculately tailored to fit his trim form.

"Hannibal…?" Will said, meaning for it to be the beginning of a sentence, but unable to continue or finish the thought beyond his friend's name. As a result, it came out as more of a question.

Hannibal turned to face Will, his face brightening as he took in the man, but betrayed no sense of being surprised by Will's appearance. "Good morning, Will. You're just in time for a breakfast sandwich. I admit that I sometimes find comfort food is the best fare after a tough night." Hannibal took a moment to consider that. He smiled devilishly. "Or, rather, a tough night and one rough morning." Will decided to ignore that last part, nervous that his brain would fizzle out and burn if he began to allow for one moment that he had kissed Hannibal and that, in response, Hannibal had vomited.

Despite this haunting thought, Hannibal's presence and the comfortable smells of cooking momentarily distracted Will from the general bizarreness of it all. He examined the food that was already plated. Two lumps of foam - one brown, the other white with a yellow center - sat upon a small mound of perfectly cubed and seasoned hash browns. A piece of bacon stuck jauntily out from beneath the potatoes, and the entire meal was covered with some sort of herb and what looked like crushed bacon dust. The rim of the plate featured a strange pattern of light orange dots.

Will scrunched up his face at the plate. "It doesn't look anything like any breakfast sandwich I've ever had before…"

Hannibal chuckled lightly, continuing to plate the food. "You just woke up from a near-death experience and all you can comment on is my cooking?"

"A near death-?" Will managed to get out, suddenly reminded of the multitude of questions he had. "What day is it? How long have you been here? And where are my dogs?"

Hannibal smiled patiently, as if dealing with a child. He handed the two plates of food to Will. "The pack is fine, Will. They're in their beds enjoying their breakfasts, just as you should. Bring these to your dining room table. I promise it's nothing more than your average breakfast sandwich. I admit, I've been a bit creative and deconstructed it just a bit. I've made an essence of egg foam as well as croissant foam. Otherwise, it's exactly what you get if you ordered it at one of the local bodegas you love so well." Hannibal's grin deepened as he watched Will's confusion over the concept of foam eggs and bread. "I just need to get the coffee. Then we can have a civilized conversation about your little adventure over breakfast." Before Will could argue, Hannibal turned on his heel towards the French press. Will didn't remember owning a French press. He proceeded to follow Hannibal's command to bring the plates out, but then he remembered that he also definitely didn't own a dining room table. He stopped short and turned back towards Hannibal.

“I don’t have a dining room table.” *How humiliating,* Will thought to himself. *This is probably the first and last time Hannibal will ever visit.*

Hannibal didn’t turn from the French press as he responded. “I assumed you didn’t. I hope you don’t mind. I brought some items from my storage with me. I didn’t know how long I’d have to bunker down here. Your dining room is upstairs, Will.”

Now it was Will’s turn to quickly turn on his heels. He moved as fast as the two delicate plates would allow him, his mind spinning with confusion and awe at the very idea of Hannibal redesigning an entire floor of his home. Will knew he didn’t really use the second story, but that didn’t give Hannibal the right to come in here and do whatever he pleased.

Upon reaching the bottom of the staircase, Will briefly stuck his head into the front room. It was some relief to see the pack in their beds, distractedly working away at some treat Hannibal had given them, though it didn’t completely ease his mind. And it really didn’t help that these treats looked an awful lot like actual bones. Will decided he’d deal with that later. For now, there was a more pressing matter- investigating “his” dining room. He turned his gaze back towards the staircase, and began his ascent.

As Will took the final step to the upper level and walked into the large room, he audibly gasped. Feeling his limbs growing weak with shock, Will briskly moved fully into the room and placed the plates on the behemoth of a dining room table that now stood proudly in Will Graham’s home. Once the plates were safe, Will ran out of the room and looked down the stairs. Yes, he was still at home. He wasn’t in Hannibal’s apartment. He was sure of it.

Hearing or perhaps sensing Will at the top of the staircase, Hannibal’s voice echoed up from the kitchen to Will’s ears. “No need to thank me. It’s just some pieces I had in storage. I wasn’t sure how long it would take for you to heal, and I wasn’t about to let myself live for more than a few hours in a space that didn’t have a dining room.”

Stunned, Will turned back around, more ready to mentally take in his new and improved dining room. A large oak table dominated the center of the room, bedecked with light red table linens with gold trim and matching golden silverware. Eight chairs - one at each head, and three on each side - seemed to be cut from the same oak tree as the table, and featured ornate yet stylishly subtle carvings. Cautiously moving closer to the table, as if nervous it were some sort of threatening bait, Will stepped on something soft. He looked down, finding that his normally bare wooden floor was decorated with a luxurious Turkish rug that blanketed most of the room. As if this all wasn’t enough, two golden candelabras proudly stood near the center of the table, flanking a matching gold vase from which a brilliant bouquet of flowers exploded.

Taking this all in, Will swallowed hard. Not only was he never going to be able to repay Hannibal for these pieces, he doubted he’d ever use them again once Hannibal left. Nor would he be able to take proper care of this room. He briefly imagined the wooden furniture rotting in this room, bedecked with cloudy, unpolished candelabras covered in cobwebs, and dead flowers sticking disjointedly out of a similarly murky vase. He sighed. Hannibal was better off selling this stuff - or maybe even giving it to a museum, it was all so beautiful - than giving it to someone like him.

Will grabbed the plates to set them. He had no idea where they should both sit at a table like this. *Would it be weird for us to both sit next to each other on one side? Or maybe with one chair in between us? Or maybe we each sit in one of the chairs on opposite sides, facing each other? Or do we each sit at the head? But that's so far away… but maybe that would be better for Hannibal, considering my smell…?* Will decided to put each plate at either head - this seemed the safest move - and, as he was placing one of the plates at the head that lay deeper into the room, Will noticed a strange shadow sitting in the room's corner. Putting the plate down, Will walked over to the corner, his eyebrows narrowed. It was a box, a wooden one, and very large - about seven feet in length and four feet wide. Will ran his hand across the top of the box, mesmerized. *What could this be? Is it some sort of dining room fixture that I'm too stupid to know about?* As his hand glided along the box's side, he discovered that the top was a lid. He covertly turned to look behind him, making sure Hannibal wasn't nearby, then began to slowly open the box's lid, which let out a satisfying creak in response.

"Were you always this curious, Will? Or is this a trait you've picked up from your time spent working for Jack?"

Will jumped, surprised to find Hannibal suddenly standing in the door frame and holding two delicate and matching cups of coffee. Hannibal silently placed one cup near each of the two plates, then sat down at one end of the table.

"Take a seat, Will, we need to talk."

"Yes, I would say so," Will sneered as he walked towards the other head of the table and took a seat. He folded his hands and looked directly into Hannibal's eyes, refusing to give the doctor any more hints as to how terrified and confused he was.

In response to Will's somewhat endearing attempt at bravado, Hannibal released the full force of his patronizing smile before asking, "Will, this is your table. As your guest, I must follow your lead. Where shall we begin?"

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Breakfast continues, the truth comes out.

Will's mind buzzed. He had so many questions, that it was a near impossible task to neatly order them and determine which would be best to ask first. Will's eyes looked away from Hannibal, and instead concentrated themselves on the table before him, as if they instinctively knew that staring back at Hannibal did nothing towards organizing his chaotic brain. Meanwhile, Will's finger's absently fiddled with the hem of his white shirt. Hannibal waited patiently.

Finally, Will blurted out the best question he could come up with: "What happened- why are you here?"

Hannibal bent his head towards Will. "I think you mean what happened two nights ago. Last night was dull. You were asleep and I mainly focused my energies on getting your dogs in order. Will, were they ever taught obedience?" His face demonstrated playful concern.

"What? Of course they have, they're just not used to you, just as you're not used to them. I -" Will stopped himself before he continued down this tempting path of comforting and strangely normal conversation. "Two nights ago, then? What happened?"

Hannibal leaned back in his seat. "You got yourself into a bit of trouble, Will. You're lucky I found you. You don't remember anything?"

Will thought hard, trying to pull these memories out of the darkened void of his mind. "No, I don't remember much. Remember? Ever since your former patient attacked me, I have some… blank spaces. I guess this is one of them." Hannibal waited expectantly. Will sighed. "I remember some pieces. I went to sleep, then woke up in the woods, naked. Some man beat me within an inch of my life. Then I think you were there? Did you - " Will stopped himself from finishing this final question. It was too obvious a thing to ask.

Hannibal lightly chuckled. "Oh, yes. That man was not too happy that you killed his brother."

"I killed his brother?" Will spat out. "I would remember that," he muttered, frowning at how this came out as more of a question than a statement.

"You didn't just kill him."

"What…?" Will asked breathlessly.

Hannibal's grin widened. "I never knew you to like leg meat so much, Will. I must find a suitable calf recipe."

Will placed both hands flat on the table, trying to re-center himself. "I - that can't be right." he stammered, trying to think of the right words for this moment. "I don't do that, I can't do that, I'm not like you…"

A brief wave of something that resembled confusion or perhaps hurt fluttered across Hannibal's face before it returned to its usual expression of even control."Well, unfortunately Will, I can't claim the kill for myself. This was your kill, and yours alone. I simply took care of the evidence."

Sweating now, Will absently wiped at his forehead. "But, then, why can't I remember anything beyond waking up in a forest?"

"Are you sure you want to know this, Will? Ignorance can be a blissful state."

Will slammed his fist down on the table in frustration, much harder than he anticipated. "Goddamn it, Hannibal. Yes. No more of your pithy sayings or backwards answers that are really just questions, just- tell me."

Hannibal swallowed and moved his steady glare momentarily away from Will to stare instead at his friend's untouched plate and the deconstructed breakfast sandwich he spent hours preparing. "You really should get something in your stomach before you-"

Will cut him off. "No- tell me. I'll eat after."

"Suit yourself, Will. But I'm going to eat mine before it's cold." Hannibal began to eat his meal, taking the time to enjoy each individual bite.

Will sat, arms folded and staring at Hannibal with a stony frown. He wouldn't ask Hannibal what this meal was, despite the fact that Will knew this is what the doctor probably wanted. But… now that he was sitting here and was watching Hannibal enjoy breakfast, Will realized that he actually was pretty hungry. And he figured it wouldn't matter whether he ate or not… he would have to wait for Hannibal to finish either way. He may as well take care of his own appetite. Begrudgingly, Will grabbed his spoon and scooped up some of the strange foam and potatoes. Will kept his eyes on his plate, not wanting to see Hannibal's reaction to him eating. Will's anger grew when he realized he really liked what he was eating - it tasted exactly like a breakfast sandwich and hash browns, but without the grease or heaviness. He resentfully enjoyed each mouthful and devoured the food quickly all the while frowning down at his plate.

Hannibal heard Will pick up his spoon, and quietly peeked across the table to watch as Will hungrily consumed what he had cooked for him. Hannibal smiled down at his plate, and continued to enjoy the pleasant silence of their meal together.

The moment Will finished, he placed his spoon down, and looked back up at Hannibal. "Ok, I ate. Now, tell me what happened."

Hannibal sighed, placing down his spoon and returning his cloth napkin from his lap back onto the table. “Will, I regret to inform you, but… you’re no longer human. At least not by any traditional definition of the term. You’re something much greater. I’m sure you know already what you are, you just haven’t accepted it yet.”

Will laughed humorlessly. He returned his hands to the table, framing the now empty plate in front of him. “If you’re not going to be serious, you should just leave.”

Hannibal smiled back at Will, tilting his head ever so slightly as he ignored Will’s invitation to leave. “Think about it, Will. My former patient - a man who believed he was an animal - attacked you. Ever since then, you’ve experienced black outs, all of which occur at night. You wake up in the middle of the forest, naked, covered in gore with a mouth full of blood, and a stomach brimming with human flesh. Your latest victim was ripped to shreds, his leg sporting a bite mark that only some sort of large animal could provide. And yet, it was you who vomited up a piece of that leg, wasn’t it Will?”

Will couldn’t speak, it was too busy trying to iron out these facts to make them make sense in some way. He blinked silently at Hannibal in response.

Hannibal continued. “And now, you’ve completely healed from wounds that any normal human would’ve died from. Yet here you are, without a scratch or scar.” Will briefly felt at his chest - Hannibal was right, it was as if he had never been stabbed. Watching him discover this, Hannibal pressed him further. “Tell me - has your sense of smell improved as of late?”

Something in Hannibal’s question refocused Will. “Were you outside of my house - in the woods - before I went to sleep that night?”

Hannibal’s eyes lit up. “Clever boy. However did you know?”

Will looked away from Hannibal. “I- I guess I could smell you? But I thought I was just - just imagining that.”

“You weren’t imagining it Will. I was there, watching. And I suppose your dogs are far more obedient for you than they’ve ever been?”

“They have, yes…”

“And I’ll add that your scent has grown positively atrocious. So. Taking all this into consideration, what could possibly be happening to you?”

Will took a moment to think, but nothing made any sense. He briefly considered that this was a dream, or that he was finally losing his mind. He turned his large, worried eyes up to Hannibal. “I don’t know…”

Hannibal leaned back in his chair, disappointed in Will for taking this long to understand. “Will, were you never told any scary stories as a child?”

“What does that have to…” Will choked out, bewildered and confused.

Hannibal promptly and gracefully stood up, rebuttoning the bottom button of his jacket before walking over to a large bookcase (which Will didn't remember owning) and pulling out a large hardcover. Hannibal swiftly opened the book up to a bookmarked page. He studied it briefly before tossing the bookmark onto the table and walking the book over to Will. He placed the book down in front of Will, then quickly moved back to stand near the bookcase once more.

Will looked down at the book, finding that it was still open to the page Hannibal had studied. Will was unable to focus his brain enough to read the entire page, but some of the words he did catch - "lycanthropy," "shape-shifting," "bite," and, the strangest of all, "werewolf," made him laugh almost manically in disbelief. He looked back up at Hannibal and managed to muster out a single monosyllabic question: "What?"

Hannibal nodded. "It's true. That former patient I sent after you, he was like you are now: a werewolf. Or at least, I suspected as much. I was curious what would happen, so I sent him to your house. You were already such an interesting specimen, Will. Can you blame me for wanting to see what you would do with even greater powers?"

"But all this, this isn't real, it's just stories, monsters from horror movies…" Will stammered.

"My former patient did bite you, didn't he? And isn't there where this all began?" Hannibal patiently asked.

"Yes, but... you must really think little of me if you think I'd believe this" Will spat out these words with as much venom as possible. "And anyway, if this was real, why wouldn't you give that power to yourself? Why me?"

"I couldn't be sure just what it would do. I would hardly be able to observe its results if I was thrown to the whims of werewolf venom. Plus, I don't think a werewolf bite would interact as nicely with my body as it did with yours." Hannibal smiled to himself after sharing this last point, as if it were some sort of joke that Will didn't understand.

"If I'm a - a- werewolf - then, can't I just bite you now?" Will half seriously asked, more interested in Hannibal's reaction to this threat than actually biting the man. "Maybe I should, after what you've apparently done to me."

Hannibal instinctually drew further back into the dark corners of the room as Will made this threat. Once more, something like hurt passed across Hannibal's face, though this time it seemed mixed with genuine fear. "You don't want to do that," Hannibal practically hissed.

"Why not?" Will asked, standing up, and taking one step closer towards Hannibal.

"Because I would be forced to kill you, Will. Even now it's very hard not to. As it is I'm fighting against every impulse in my body to not rip you apart. Your scent is more than just revolting, Will, it's like a poison. It's hard to control my more macabre proclivities when you're around." Hannibal swallowed, stepping out of the shadows and towards Will, but with marked difficulty. "You want proof of werewolves, Will? I can't quite give you that, that's something you must find within yourself. But I can provide you with some evidence." And with that, Hannibal opened his mouth. Will didn't notice anything strange at first, and was

about to complain that the doctor was once again being purposefully unclear, but then he saw them. With a slight clicking sound, two large fangs popped out of Hannibal's top row of teeth. After being sure that Will saw them, Hannibal closed his mouth. Will staggered back to his chair, collapsing into a seated position. Hannibal grinned as he watched the dawning realization settle over Will's face.

"So you're a what? A - a- vampire?" Will whispered angrily, glaring at the floor.

Hannibal's smile broadened as he returned to his seat at the head of the table. "Well done, Will."

The two sat in silence for a moment as Will held onto his sanity as tightly as possible. There had to be a way for this not to be real, some hole in Hannibal's story, no matter what Will saw, or thought he saw. "But- you just ate an entire meal. Your breakfast! I thought vampires couldn't do that."

"Oh, Will. How dreadfully unimaginative you are sometimes. I can eat human food - just as you can, too. It's just not quite as filling as blood is for me. You might say cooking and eating human food is more of a hobby than a necessity." Hannibal tilted his head, suddenly interested. "How was eating breakfast for you? Did it satisfy you as much as that man's leg did? Think hard."

Will considered this. He thought back to that night, going to sleep, and then - what? Suddenly, scraps of memory hit him hard. Images of the forest flying past him. The screams of a man, desperate to cling to life. And then the indescribable flavors, the feeling of newfound energy, of fullness, amidst the background sounds of crunching bone and wet skin torn apart. He compared this feeling to the breakfast he just ate. As nice as it was, it didn't really compare. And to be honest, he didn't feel much different than he did a moment ago. The small pangs of hunger remained. "It didn't, no," Will whispered, still staring at the floor, lost in thought and barely aware he was divulging this information to Hannibal.

"I wouldn't think so." Hannibal leaned back in his chair.

Will looked once more at the book on the table. Now that he was more willing to believe what Hannibal was telling him, he was eager to learn more. Flipping through the pages, he found a theory that werewolf transformations can be controlled by a truly skilled monster, but that they most often happen by accident, when the werewolf in question is experiencing extreme emotions or passion.

"What are you reading about?" Hannibal asked from across the table.

Will placed his hand on the page to prevent him from losing his place, and looked back up at Hannibal with eyebrows raised. "If I'm a werewolf, shouldn't I know what it all means?" This question was met with icy silence from Hannibal, who merely stared back at Will, as if he were waiting for further explanation. Will continued, embarrassed by his inability to keep secrets from the man. "I'm trying to figure out how - if this is even possible - how I can control my - my - transformations." Will felt stupid hearing his own voice using these words out loud- "werewolf," "transformations" - and turned his attention away from Hannibal and back to the book as he finished speaking.

“Based on what I’ve read on the subject, it seems that you werewolves are emotional creatures, tethered to your most base desires. Tell me Will, did you dream of something particularly exciting when you went to sleep that night?”

Will kept his eyes on the book as he felt his face grow red. Of course he remembered exactly what he had thought of just before drifting to sleep that night: Hannibal. Hannibal in silk pajamas, Hannibal in bed, Hannibal naked, just Hannibal.

Will looked up at Hannibal, startled and embarrassed, but working to maintain as even a composure as possible given the situation. “No, I don’t remember,” Will said, once more brushing the sweat from his brow.

Hannibal simply stared back at him, his icy, piercing gaze seemed fixed on Will, who stared back, unable to look away. “Will,” Hannibal’s voice was suddenly syrupy and tantalizing, “Are you sure about that? It looks like you *do* remember what you dreamed of. You should tell me.”

Before he even realized it, Will was speaking, answering Hannibal’s question. “I was thinking of you just before I fell asleep. And then I dreamed of you.”

After uttering these words, Will drew back, falling out of the chair violently. “What the fuck? How - ? I didn’t want to tell you that!”

“Really, Will, it’s nothing you should be embarrassed of. I dream of you, sometimes, too. As for your forced response, being a vampire has its benefits.” Hannibal smiled wickedly. “Apologies, but I was deadly curious, and I knew it would probably take me an hour or so to pull that secret out of you the normal way. I simply sped up the process.”

Will angrily picked up the chair and sat back down. He returned to the book, flipping through pages of full moons, fur, murder, and curses. He landed, finally, on a page that also included Hannibal’s affliction: vampirism. As he read, Will’s blood ran cold and his limbs felt soft. “So, we’re supposed to be mortal enemies?” Will asked.

When Will looked up, he saw that Hannibal was no longer staring at him, but was instead turned away, now facing the bookshelf. “It’s an obstacle I hadn’t sufficiently considered - I admit.” Hannibal turned towards Will, his face dark and sinister. “I may have acted a bit impulsively.”

The two sat in forbidding silence for what felt to Will like a lifetime.

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Werewolf flashbacks; Hannibal makes a proposition

Unable to merely sit in this icy silence, Will worked internally to recall the events of the past few nights. He consciously accepted Hannibal's claim that they were supernatural creatures, hopeful that this acceptance might allow memories to float to the surface of his mind. He concentrated on the night he fell asleep in bed while thinking of Hannibal, and started to remember more.

He recollected the overwhelming pain he felt that night, which had woken him up, tossing him to the floor of his bedroom on all fours. He remembered how his skin stretched as the bones beneath seemed to shift and grow, until his skin -along with his clothing - finally ripped off, unable to maintain itself against the pressure from within, revealing a new sort of skin, one that was covered in wild grey and black hairs that dripped with blood and barely concealed the writhing muscles that now covered his entire body….

From his position on all fours, Will glanced at his dogs, all of whom seemed alert, but not at all startled. He moved towards them - far faster than he imagined his painful legs and arms would take him - but as he came closer, the dogs inched backwards against the wall away from him, a sight that hurt Will almost more than the physical pain he just bore.

Desperate to flee from this sight, as well as to give the pack the space they apparently wanted, Will moved quickly - again, far too quickly, towards the front door. Without even slowing down, and somehow knowing that he wouldn't be able to unlock and turn the door handle, Will ran through the door, allowing an explosion of sound, wood chips and glass to fall to the ground in his wake.

The moment Will was outside, standing on the cool grass and smelling the inviting and intoxicating smells on the night air, his body suddenly ached for movement, for action, for blood. Standing there for just a few seconds felt like he was immobile for years, and his muscles seemed to scream of their soreness, as if accusing him of not using them enough. Without much thought, Will ran forward, startled by the speed with which he could pass through the trees that composed the massive forest that surrounded his small home. He weaved and bobbed through their limbs, almost gleefully enjoying the strength that propelled him ever forward.

And then he smelled it. Blood.

It was delicious and tantalizing. His stomach twisted in knots, and Will was certain that if he didn't find and eat whatever this was that called to him in the next few seconds, he would die

of starvation.

He stuck his nose to the ground, allowing the smell to guide him. Will tracked the scent for a few yards before he found a dead deer laying on the ground with a spray of bloody bullets in his sides. Will bit into the carcass, enjoying its still-warm flesh as it filled his mouth and stomach. And yet it didn't quite satisfy him. And the smell continued to linger in the air, beckoning him further into the forest. Frustrated, Will let out an angry howl and launched himself forward, moving with preternatural speed towards whatever it was emitting this scent. The smell grew in strength with each passing second and massive globs of saliva fell from Will's mouth as the promised flavors became ever more tantalizing, ever more tortuous.

Then, just as suddenly as the smell hit him, Will caught sight of his target. In response, Will gracefully crouched behind a tree trunk and watched closely, waiting for his chance to strike. The source of the smell was a man, dressed mainly in hunting camouflage, carrying a gun. At first, Will couldn't tell where the blood was coming from or why he could smell it so strongly. And then, as if on instinct, his attention zeroed in on the man's calf. It was a small scratch, but enough to emit a smell equivalent to the piercing sounds of a police siren. The man must've absently scratched at a mosquito bite, or brushed up a bit too close against an errant tree branch. He probably didn't even realize the open wound hidden beneath the layer of denim jeans he wore.

Will waited impatiently for the man to turn away, but he continued to face Will's direction, his gun at the ready. Will's stomach felt tight with hunger, every inch of his hairy skin felt electric, like he would explode if he waited one second longer. Fuck it *Will thought, then pounced at the man, bringing him to the dusty earth. Once down, Will remained on top of the man and ripped the gun out of his hand with his powerful jaws before breaking it in two. Will brought his large right paw and slashed at the man's face, rendering him immediately unconscious. Letting out a jubilant howl of victory and excitement, Will turned his attention towards the calf that had called to him. He ripped the denim away with his teeth, then proceeded to take large bites out of the man's leg. Chewing on the gore and lapping at the blood, Will experienced a state of euphoria he never knew previously. Everything felt soft and gooey, like he was in some sort of wonderful dream. He continued to eat at the leg, losing himself completely to the moment, his hunger and desire softening into something closer to satisfaction. It was the first time Will felt truly confident, like he could do anything he wanted, have anything or anyone he wanted. He felt like he imagined Hannibal must feel, and revelled briefly in the idea that he could be like Hannibal, if only for a moment.*

And then it started happening again. The awful pain, the shifting bones, his skin ripping open -this time revealing blood-soaked pale skin beneath his well-muscled and hairy exterior. Nonononononono *Will thought, not wanting this to end, not wanting to return to the puny human body he usually inhabited. He tried to crawl away from the man's body, but could only get a few feet away before he was paralyzed by the pain.*

When he woke up, he would find the man's brother standing over Will, with a rifle aimed directly at his head.

"Will? Are you remembering?" Hannibal's voice pulled Will back into the present. Memory very visibly flooded into Will's eyes. Hannibal smirked. "Ah, so you are. What was it like?

You've killed before with your bare hands; how did it feel to kill with your teeth?"

Will quickly wiped at his eyes, not wanting Hannibal to see the tears that were rapidly forming. This was all too much. "I.." Will slowly looked up, meeting Hannibal's steady glare. "I felt powerful," he let out a dark chuckle. "I felt better than I do now- than I do normally. Everything seemed so simple. I was guided by complete instinct, and yet I still could do or have anything I wanted."

"Our instincts liberate us more than our learned behavior, Will. It sounds like you may have met your true self for the first time."

"And so - what? You want me to *thank* you? For-for having something out of a monster movie attack me?" Will stopped himself, not wanting to allow himself get so passionately angry as to experience another transformation here in his dining room.

"No, I neither expect nor desire gratitude from you, Will. I only wanted a chance to come clean about my experiment." Hannibal paused, eying Will closely. "And I hope that you might be open to one more-"

"One more?!" Will stood up, pacing along his end of the room. "You must think really low of me if you expect-" Will suddenly fell to the floor in a fetal position, a wave of pain passing through his body.

Hannibal stood up from his chair and moved supernaturally fast to the middle of the dining room table, cautious to not pass some unseen boundary. His eyes betrayed the nervousness he otherwise artfully concealed. "Will, relax. You don't want to change in front of me."

The pain swelled briefly as Will listened to Hannibal's condescending tone. But he knew that Hannibal was - unfortunately - right. Will didn't want to change right now. He breathed slowly, concentrating on the pattern he found on the exquisitely soft carpet beneath him. The pain passed, and he felt normal enough to stand up and return to his seat.

Holding his hands together on the table in front of him, Will calmly, but with a tightened jaw, continued the conversation. "Go on. What is this second experiment?"

Hannibal carefully examined Will from his somewhat distant vantage point. Apparently satisfied that Will wasn't going to change any time soon, Hannibal turned on his heel and walked back towards the bookcase. He spoke as he moved. "Unsurprisingly, there are many beliefs and legends surrounding both the werewolf and the vampire. One of the benefits I've experienced since my change is unlimited time, which means I've been able to study most of the folklore surrounding my kind. I haven't had much interest in the werewolf until I had one in my office." He paused at the bookshelf and smiled back at Will. "But since then, I've done some reading, and I'd like to show you something that might be of interest."

"...Sure." Will responded cautiously.

With alarming speed, Hannibal grabbed a book off of one of the shelves and tossed it towards Will, where it landed perfectly next to his empty breakfast plate.

Will examined the book. A word alien to Will - “Vukodlak” - decorated the book’s cover in large golden lettering. Inside, Will found pages of dense text, all written in a language he didn’t know. He sighed. *Would it kill Hannibal to ever be straight forward? Maybe it was a vampire thing…* He closed the book and looked back at Hannibal from under his brows.

“As I’m sure you already knew, I can’t read this, Hannibal.”

“Do you trust me to translate it for you?” Hannibal asked, slipping back into his seat.

“Do I have a choice?”

Hannibal lightly chuckled. “You always have a choice, Will. For example, you could’ve chosen to change into a large dog a few moments ago. We could’ve been fighting instead of speaking civilly as we are now. For that, you have my unending gratitude. I would’ve hated to have had to kill you in such a repugnant form.”

“Hannibal, enough. Just explain.”

“Of course.” Hannibal gestured gracefully towards the book that sat in front of Will. “What you have before you is a book detailing the Serbo-Croation understanding of vampires. It’s titled *Vukodlak*, their word for vampires. This word literally translates to “wolf’s hair.” After I had my former patient turn you, I found your smell to be completely revolting. It wasn’t so much fun to be near you anymore, Will. I regretted my experiment quickly, and so returned to my collection of literature to try to find a solution. Remembering the strange term for vampire, one that seems connected to the wolf, I re-read the *Vukodlak*.”

“So sorry to dampen your fun.” Will bit each word.

Hannibal simply smiled politely in response before continuing with his story. “I found in the pages of this book a theory that the vampire and the werewolf are not so different. I, of course, am not entirely sure about our similarities, particularly after not only smelling you, but witnessing your undignified work in the woods.” Hannibal sniffed condescendingly. “Regardless, in Slavic lore, the werewolf and the vampire are closely related. Two sides of the same coin. In fact, the Greek term “Vyrkolaka” can translate to vampire. But it can also translate to werewolf. We might share the same venom, just presented in a different form.”

“So what? Hannibal, I just want to go back to being human, I don’t care about these insignificant ancient theories.”

Hannibal frowned. “Returning to humanity is no longer possible, Will. But I’m not sorry to say that. I can offer you something much better. According to the *Vukodlak*, werewolves can become vampires. Would you like that, Will? You wouldn’t have to deal with turning into or smelling like a dog, anymore. And...we’d be able to be close. I could guide you through the change. And beyond that.” As he spoke, Hannibal maintained a look that anyone else would interpret as indifference, but Will noticed something that looked like longing in the man’s angular features.

Will stared back steadily at Hannibal. “I might like that. How would it be done?”

Hannibal returned the glare. “Greatness require some pain. Are you willing to go through Hell to get to heaven?”

“Hannibal, just tell me what I have to do. I don’t want to live like this- I can’t.”

“You’d have to let me kill you.” Hannibal spoke the words as if they were simple and obvious.

Will’s face betrayed his confusion. “You- what? Kill me?”

Hannibal sighed in disappointment. “Yes, Will. As the book before you states, werewolves can only become vampires after death. If you allow me, I can kill you. Once your heart stops beating, I’ll feed your corpse with my blood, vampire blood. When you awaken, you will be like me.”

Realizing that Hannibal was serious, Will’s face grew pale. He shook his head slowly. “Kill me? No…I - I’d rather just- Who is to say that that book is accurate? No, you probably just want to kill me. ”

“You’re far too interesting for me to want you dead, Will. No. I would’ve killed you long ago if that’s what I wanted from you. I’d much prefer to have you with me. If you let me change you, we could have whatever we wanted. The *Vukodlak* is accurate with nearly everything it says about vampirism. It's the most accurate text I've come across. You just need to trust me.” All pretenses of cool indifference suddenly left Hannibal’s face as he made these final pleas. Instead, he was the very image of ravenous desire.

The sight shocked Will, who always believed himself to be far from worthy of the doctor’s attention. Will yearned to say yes, to blindly accept Hannibal’s offer of eternal life and partnership. But - trust Hannibal? Will wasn’t so sure.

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Hannibal, there must be another way. Why would I even risk that?" Will asked, a tinge of hurt anger in his voice.

"You'd rather live your life as a dog? Alone? If you did this -" Hannibal abruptly stopped and looked thoughtfully at Will, reading his face before starting again. "If you allowed me to do this for you, we'd be able to leave together, like we planned. Is that not a future you've fantasized over, Will? Or perhaps we would stay here for some time. Freedom, Will. True freedom is what I offer - isn't that worth the risk?" As he asked this final question, Hannibal titled his head, a move so endearing to Will that he nearly accepted the man's proposal.

Instead, Will chuckled sarcastically. "Obviously it's not that I'm denying my desire for freedom. I'm just rejecting that death is the only way to achieve it."

Ever so briefly, Hannibal winced. "It's not quite death… would you call me dead, Will?"

"I… I don't know what I'd call you, Hannibal." He shook his head.

Another suffocating silence once more pervaded the room. Hannibal sat completely still, never once removing his quietly aggressive gaze from Will, who was too busy staring at his fidgeting hands to notice Hannibal's strange glare. Will instead focused his thoughts on conjuring the right words to tell Hannibal that he wasn't interested in dying. That he and Hannibal didn't have to be enemies- after all, weren't they currently enjoying a rather civilized breakfast, all things considered? And that maybe there was a way that Will could become a vampire like Hannibal, or, even better in Will's mind, go back to being human that didn't involve allowing Hannibal to kill him.

Will stood up slowly, deciding that the mundane behavior of clearing off the table might otherwise mask or at least dull the blow that Hannibal might feel upon Will rejecting his offer. As he grabbed his own plate and mug, Will began to explain himself. "Listen, I'm not going to let you kill me. There has to be ano-" But before Will could finish, Hannibal somehow *appeared* directly behind Will. Suddenly feeling Hannibal's breath on the nape of his neck, Will whipped himself around to face him, in the process dropping the plate and mug to the ground where they shattered at the two men's feet.

In the millisecond Will had to look at Hannibal, he discovered that Hannibal had found another way to turn Will: If Will wouldn't let Hannibal kill him, then Hannibal would simply kill him the usual way.

Pain suddenly radiated from Will's stomach. Looking down, he found - not to his surprise - that Hannibal held the handle of a knife currently lodged halfway into Will's stomach. Will stared at the blood that rapidly saturated his white shirt. He soon also became aware of Hannibal's other hand, which rested softly on the back of Will's neck. The two stood

perfectly still, neither one wanting to make any further moves just yet. Staring fixedly on the bottom part of his shirt, which was now saturated with blood as it clung to the skin of his abdomen, Will was shocked to discover that he felt something else besides the pain of the knife's blade, something far stronger. Although he would never admit to it, Will felt something akin to butterflies frantically thrashing in his stomach, an electrifying sort of giddy excitement that it took complete paralysis to hide from Hannibal. Will wanted this. And he didn't want to wait for Hannibal to make the decision any longer. Will grabbed Hannibal's wrist with both of his hands -his fingers briefly enjoying the sensation of Hannibal's skin beneath them - and pulled it roughly towards him, pushing the knife deeper into his own flesh. The suddenness of the knife's plunge made Will briefly fall back, but Hannibal grabbed at his waist, holding him up against the weight of his own body. Most horrifyingly, Will felt his bones begin to shift beneath his skin, far slower than previously, but still, the prospect of transforming now was disconcerting. He wanted to join Hannibal, not to fight him. Will's shaky hands reached up, tugging first at Hannibal's lapel before finding the man's shoulders, and draping himself over them.

"This isn't going to be enough, Will." Hannibal whispered against the skin of Will's neck. "You're about to change. Are you sure you want this?"

Will opened his mouth, wanting to instruct Hannibal to finish it, that he never wanted something more, but he was unable to speak. Blood bubbled up and trickled down his lips as something closer to a cough than words came out of his mouth.

Will prayed quietly that Hannibal understood his assent. Hannibal pulled away from Will, still holding him up in the crook of his left arm. Will could barely keep his eyes open, he was woozy, and warm and cold all at once, but the sight of Hannibal's small grin gave him some hope. *He understood. Of course he understood.*

And just as quickly as Will had pulled Hannibal -and the knife - closer, Hannibal plucked the knife out of his stomach, causing Will to fall onto the floor. Will blinked and briefly saw an awe-inspiring sight: Hannibal perched over him, knife in hand, before Hannibal plunged the knife in and out of Will's torso, not stopping until the two were covered in blood. Hannibal gagged at the noxious smell of Will's tainted werewolf blood, but managed to maintain the self-control required for what came next. Hannibal took off his jacket, and carefully folded it before draping it on a nearby chair. He next unbuttoned and pushed up his left shirt sleeve and pulled a handkerchief from the discarded jacket's breast pocket, using it to daintily wipe away the blood now coating his left wrist.

Will, just barely maintaining consciousness, watched as Hannibal's fangs appeared with a satisfying pop. Hannibal closed his eyes and sank his teeth into his wrist, enjoying the taste of his own blood. After a few seconds he violently pulled away from his wrist, taking a sizable strip of skin with him.

He leaned close to Will's face, placing his now bleeding wrist just above Will's lips. "Drink" he instructed. Will tried to raise his head to reach Hannibal's wrist, but was far too weak. He opened his mouth, allowing some errant drops to fall onto his tongue. Hannibal's blood was beyond delicious and Will felt deliriously dizzy as he tasted these droplets. Suddenly feeling somewhat stronger, Will's tongue pushed past his lips, desperately hungry for more,

searching for Hannibal's wrist. Hannibal watched as Will struggled for more of his blood before finally, mercifully, placing his wrist against Will's lips. Will drank deeply, losing himself in his hunger, greedily sucking at Hannibal's artery like a straw. After a few minutes of this, Will felt Hannibal's strong hand on his forehead, holding him down so that he could remove his wrist from Will's mouth. Once free, Hannibal watched as his skin closed over the wound, healing with preternatural speed.

Although tasting the blood initially made Will feel impossibly stronger, the sudden deprivation of Hannibal's bloody wrist seemed to do the reverse. "Please - more - " he managed to gasp, no longer able to move or speak in complete sentences.

"Greedy." Hannibal tisked, looking back at Will from beneath his eyebrows. "There will be more feasts in your future, I'm sure. But you must be patient. Now it's time for you to die."

Even before Hannibal uttered these words, Will found himself in a desperate fight against unconsciousness. His eyelids felt impossibly heavy and his mind was woozy. He tried to explain to Hannibal that he needed more blood, that the pain was returning and when he was feeding, he felt so much more aware, so much more powerful, so much more alive. Now, the stab wounds once more screamed in pain, and he felt pretty certain that he would die. Was Hannibal joking about that? Did he not realize that Will was actually going to die here, on his new dining room carpet? Unfortunately, the only thing that Will managed to say before slipping into the black oblivion of the dead was a barely perceptible "...asshole."

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tried to sleep in it in your bedroom earlier, but your smell was so excessive that it even managed to seep through the wood. And so, the box and I settled in the dining room instead."

Overwhelmed by the amount of information and change being thrown at him, Will felt at the fabric beneath him. "Is this…. silk?"

"Clever boy. But on to more important matters: how do you feel, Will? It seems the transformation was a success."

"Are you surprised?"

"When dealing with the paranormal, Will, it's hard to always predict accurately."

A wave of anger passed over Will after hearing Hannibal's cool indifference. "So this was worth the risk?"

"It was for me, Will. And I'm glad my hope was unthwarted. Now you and I can live forever, be whoever and whatever we want. But, of course, I wasn't the one who took the risk. If you remember, Will, it was you who pulled my knife in closer. So then, I must ask you: was the risk worth it?"

As Will remembered, his anger disappeared and was swiftly replaced by something resembling bliss. It all worked. And now, Hannibal was able to be close to him without gagging - was even holding him, talking of their future.

Will pushed at Hannibal's arm, wanting to create some space to turn around. To Will's surprise, he discovered that he was strong enough to actually move the arm enough to spin onto his back and then to his right side. The two men's noses brushed against each other. Besides Hannibal's eyes, which somehow seemed illuminated in the darkness, Will could only see a vague outline of Hannibal's body. Hannibal reached out and tucked an errant curl out of Will's eye behind his ear.

"Yes, I think it was." Will whispered.

Two hands found their way to Will's face and gently cradled him. Before Will could respond, Hannibal's lips collided into his. Will kissed him back, hungrily pushing past Hannibal's lips with his tongue, just as he had done a few nights (or was it mornings?) before. But instead of gagging or retching in response, Hannibal violently kissed him back. Will felt dizzy with happiness and desire.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks so much for reading this fun little vampire HanniGraham story! And thanks for all of the lovely comments! I hope you enjoyed reading!

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